6: Lane T-3 (no date) 1923 EGl Albania EGl

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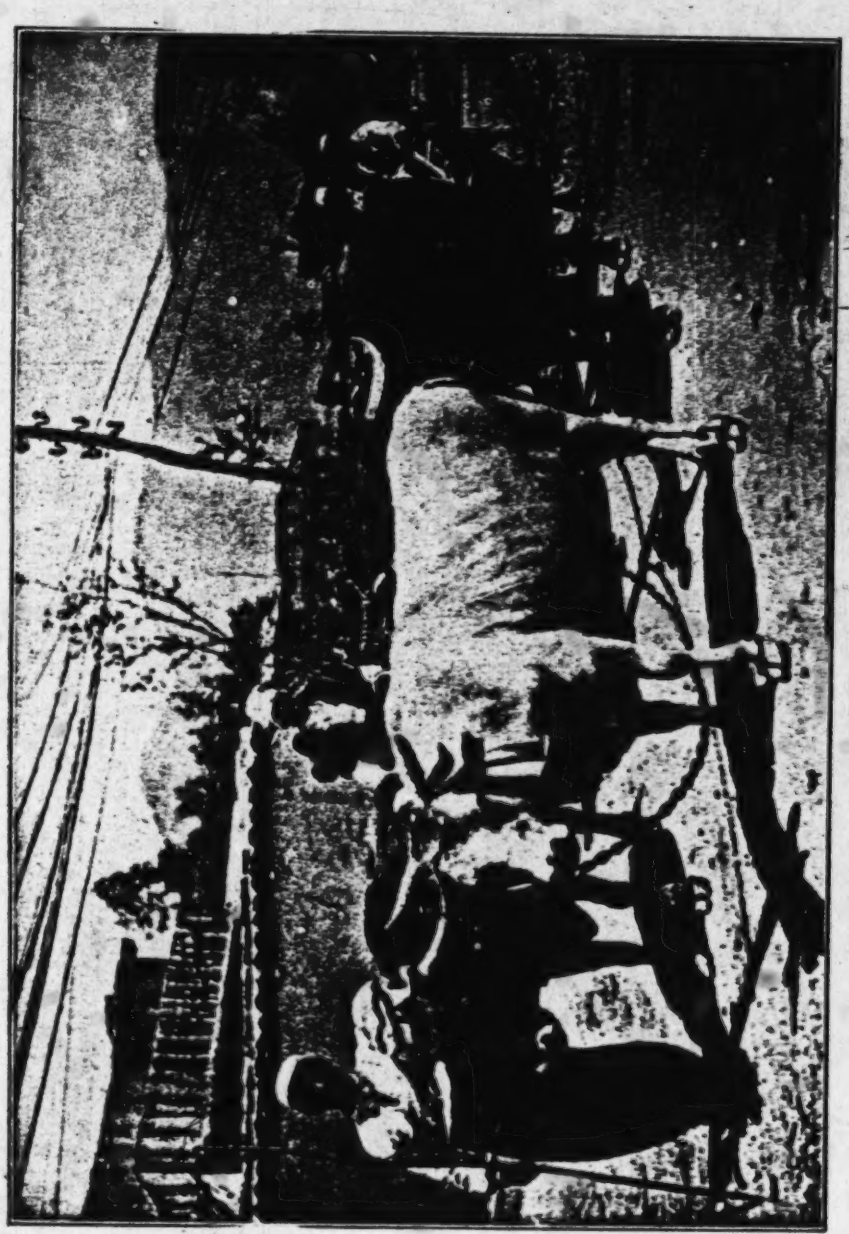

THE ROLLER THAT IS SMOOTHING THE NEW BOULEVARD IN TIRANA

10:Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGl Albania EGl

especially near the sea, where the soil is alluvial and stoneless, had to be thirty-two spans wide (7 yards or 6·48 metres) in order to give a pack-horse space to dodge the mud-holes in winter, when the road became a morass. Excellent examples of this type of road traverse the half-drained marshes of Ngurëzë at the mouth of the river Mat.

Mountain roads eight spans wide led to villages 'where carts had never gone'. Certain other roads led to the rare villages 'where carts had gone'. These crossed firm inland plains such as the floor of the valley of Shkrel or the plain of Nangë in Lumë; in Shkrel they had to be twelve spans wide (8 feet or 2·43 metres), and in Lumë wide enough to take a cart. A picturesque detail from Mirditë is that a 'flag-road', that is to say, a road along which a flag was carried in tribal, wedding or other processions, had to be as wide as the flagstaff was long.

Roads always followed boundaries; as a general rule, when one passed two wards or two neighbours, exactly half of it had to be in the territory of each. In other words, their boundary had to run down its exact middle. Few modifications of this law are to be noted. When fields were on a slope, the road between them was often made on the upper one. The elders laying it out had reasoned that it would gradually slip down the hill, increasing the area of the upper field and diminishing that of the lower one. When there was an irrigation channel by the road, rules varied. In Theth one neighbour left three spans of land for the channel, and the other the same amount for the adjacent footpath. Their agreement might be verbal, noted only by witnesses, or it might be written down by the priest as tribal clerk and placed in the church archives. Each neighbour had full access to path and channel alike. In Lumë, on the other hand, a path was left on both sides of an irrigation channel. These were not only for men to walk on but also for maintaining the sides of the channel, a necessary safeguard even on level ground. Each neighbour, having his own path, was less liable to quarrel with the other.

In Perlat a highway was twenty-four spans wide (16 feet or 4·86 metres), to enable a horse laden with firewood to pass another without the loads touching. Elsewhere there was no provision for two-way traffic. Road-making in our sense did not exist, and roads were merely trodden out by man or beast in the scanty space available between fields or across mountain slopes. On a typical

10: Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGl Albania EGl

road two loaded donkeys might meet and pass, but two loaded horses could not. When these met, one or the other had to step aside from the road, turning back, if need be to find a suitable place in which to do so. This was almost invariably of nature's making; there were no artificial passing places as on narrow motor roads in England.

Load generally determined priority of passage. To use Albanian phraseology, when a riding-saddle met a riding-saddle on a horse-track the one with no saddle-bags or other load besides the rider had to turn back. The riding-saddle had to make way for the loaded pack-saddle, but had priority over an empty one. When two pack-saddles met, the one loaded and the other empty, the latter had to make way for the former. When they were both loaded or both empty, the one which was nearer a possible place at which to step off the road had to turn back. The same rules applied to carts. In the rare cases where there was plenty of room for two loaded horses or carts, there was no 'Keep right' or 'Keep left'; they could pass on whichever side they wished.

The rules about priority were apt to be honoured in the breach rather than the observance. A man who was turned back on his road felt, even if priority was not his, as much disgraced as if his gun had been taken from him. His honour was lost, and could not be redeemed unless he killed his rival. There have been many deaths for the sake of precedence. The men of Godolesh, who were satisfied when the offender was fined by the elders, were condemned by their neighbours as soft and citified. But even in Godolesh there was no more fertile cause of murder than disputes about who should have the right of way. The trouble arose because priority rules were often confused, especially on purpose by strong wilful men, with the general law of road ownership. As enunciated by Father Gjeçov, this law said that a village street or a public highway was nobody's individual perquisite, but belonged to one man as much as to another. Hence, the living and the dead—traveller and live-stock, bride and corpse—had an absolute right to use either, and no man, even if the road passed close to the door of his house, could deny this right.

A road was free to all. It was for breaking this general law that highway robbery was punished so much more severely than other forms of theft, and that a traveller who killed a dangerous dog on a highway did not have to compensate its owner.